

Gospel Gleanings, "...especially the parchments"

Volume 27, Number 4

January 23, 2011



A Special Savior

But refuse profane and old wives' fables, and exercise thyself rather unto godliness. For bodily exercise profiteth little: but godliness is profitable unto all things, having promise of the life that now is, and of that which is to come. This is a faithful saying and worthy of all acceptation. For therefore we both labour and suffer reproach, because we trust in the living God, who is the Saviour of all men, specially of those that believe. These things command and teach. (1 Timothy 4:7-11, KJV 1900)

Often when people misconstrue Scripture, they either read too much or too little into its words. While there are a few professing Christians who are true universalists (They believe that every human being ever born will spend eternity with God in heaven), perhaps one of the most dominant beliefs in modern Christianity is that God really "wants" to save all humanity, but most of humanity refuses to accept God on His terms, so they end up not saved. I've often wondered. If we apply an engineer's efficiency assessment to this wishful, but incompetent, system of belief, how efficient is the system that God settled on to save sinners? And if that system is so dreadfully inefficient, why did God settle on it rather than designing a more efficient system of eternal salvation? They praise God's benevolent design, but they never confront the dreadful and unacceptable inefficiency of that system to accomplish its designed purpose.

In vivid and diametric contradiction to this adoration of inefficiency in God, Scripture repeatedly affirms that God's system for the eternal salvation of His chosen people is one hundred percent efficient. Nothing is lost to inefficiency. Nothing is lost to friction. Nothing is lost—period! "...he shall save his people from their sins." (Matthew 1:21b)

Those passages that focus on God's "wish" but highly inefficient method use as claimed support for their belief also often provide the best possible refutation of their own beliefs. Most of these passages simply say far too much to harmonize with their beliefs. Not a one of these passages says that God is the potential or possible Savior of all humanity. Most of them, our study passage included, say that He is in fact the Savior of all men. What do these passages mean? How should we correctly interpret them? A few simple observations might help.

1. When properly read and contextually interpreted, no two passages or doctrines in the Bible contradict each other. In fact, the incredible harmony of sixty-six books, written by some forty to forty-five men, over a time span of around fifteen hundred years is one of the most convincing proofs of the

Bible's supernatural origin—and of its supernatural preservation.

2. Examine the most literal interpretation of the passage that respects its context and that harmonizes with other Scriptures. In the case of this passage, the most literal interpretation would make God the Savior of all male humans, but not the Savior of any female humans. Of course, this interpretation is absurd on its face, and should therefore be rejected. In the case of this passage, the simple point is made. The passage does not say that God wants to be the Savior of all humanity. It declares what He in fact is. However we define "...all men..." in this verse, we have identified all of the people who shall spend eternity with God in glory.
3. Many, perhaps most, apparent universal terms in Scripture are specifically restricted in the context, or by a comparative study of the passage with other related Scriptures. Example; in the case of this passage, if we accept the literal teachings of multiple Scriptures that hell shall indeed be populated, we must reject the universalistic interpretation, for it contradicts those passages. A study of many Bible topics and doctrines will lead us to various sections of the Bible to gain greater insight into it. First Peter teaches extensively on suffering, both as a Christian and not as a Christian. Interestingly, any study of the Bible's use of the word—and doctrine of—hell will lead us to Jesus' own words and teachings. His teachings leave no doubt to a reasonable reader that He intended to teach about a real place of eternal punishment, and a populated place. The moment we accept that eternal hell shall be occupied by even one human—and Scripture makes it clear that more than one shall be there—we force a contradiction between those teachings of Jesus, and other Scriptures, and these universalistic sounding passages.

4. How do we resolve these apparent contradictions? The simplest resolution is often the best. Do these apparent universalistic terms refer to all human beings without exception? Or do they apply to all classes of human beings, not just a refined and carefully filtered segment of humanity?

First century Jews fiercely excluded most non-Jews from God's mercy, covenants, and blessings. They referred to Gentiles, non-Jews, as dogs, an animal that in the first century was not the household pet, but often a vicious scavenger to be feared and avoided. In this cultural setting, Jesus directed His disciples to preach the gospel in an ever-expanding spiral beginning at Jerusalem, throughout Judeah, on to Samaria (quite a feat for a first century Jew to tackle), and finally "...unto the uttermost part of the earth." (Acts 1:8) Clearly God's intent for the gospel and the New Testament church covered more classes of humanity than bona fide Jews and Gentile proselytes. And just as clearly, God's purpose in saving "...his people..." from their sins included more than just Jewish people and Gentile proselytes. In fact, John describes a representative collection of all the redeemed in heaven by this language, "...Thou art worthy to take the book, and to open the seals thereof: for thou wast slain, and hast redeemed us to God by thy blood out of every kindred, and tongue, and people, and nation." (Revelation 5:9) We could not possibly accurately define or describe God's family against such a narrow first century Jewish perception unless we intentionally used terms and words that would sound rather universal in scope.

5. Simply stated, we reconcile our study passage with other Scriptures by its inclusion of all kinds of people, not just one class. Paul and John (Revelation 5:9) are teaching the same truth.

... *who is the Saviour of all men, specially of those that believe.* The prevailing view of cosmic inefficiency, mentioned above, that God really wants to save every human being, but the final act that actually causes true eternal salvation is the sinner's act, not God's, simply fails to harmonize with Paul's straightforward statement of inspired fact. People embracing this view will repeat the worn out and non-Biblical cliché, "God the Father did His part, Jesus on the cross did His part, and the Holy Spirit is actively doing His part. They've done all they can do. Now it is up to you. Will you accept and believe?" Folks who hold to this view will quote passages such as the one we now study and loudly proclaim God's free and sincere offer to save all

who will simply accept salvation on God's terms. However, when questioned regarding their assessment of the actual number of people who do accept God's offer on God's terms, they uniformly indicate their belief that the number is quite small indeed. Further, if we study the spread of the gospel across our globe, although it has lightly touched many areas, it has historically been concentrated in western Europe and North America. From a worldwide cultural perspective, according to this view, God becomes the primary Savior of white, Anglo-Saxon, English speaking people, not the universal Savior they initially proclaimed. When fully analyzed, their actual doctrine fails to match their broad claim. They do not actually believe this passage at all. The passage does not say that God wants to be the Savior of all men. It categorically says He is the Savior of all men. A simple consideration of the word "all" as used in this passage will resolve the issue. Based on Revelation 5:9, cited above, God is indeed the Savior, the actual Savior of all kinds, classes, and races of people. People from every "...kindred, and tongue [language], and people, and nation" will "wake up" from life's slumber at their physical death and consciously, eternally enjoy heaven's glories with their true and actual Savior. Heaven will not be made up only of Jews and Gentile proselytes to Judaism, or primarily of white, Anglo-Saxons of Western European origin.

...*specially of those that believe.* Based on the prior clause in the verse, the saved in heaven's glory encompasses all kinds, classes, and races of people. However, there is a "here and now" special salvation for God's children within that far broader number who believe the truth of the gospel, who believe that truth proclaimed by Paul in First Timothy 3:16. They enjoy blessings, joys, and fellowship with God right now that children of God who do not believe these truths do not know. Jesus makes the same point in His beautiful analogy of Himself as the door and Shepherd of His sheepfold.

I am come that they might have life, and that they might have it **more abundantly.** (John 10:10b; emphasis added)

All of God's sheep, His beloved and chosen children, receive life from their Good and Great Shepherd. Some of them believe in Him as their Savior, and they receive over and above the life that they received in the new birth. They live in an abundance of spiritual blessings "...in the heavenlies..." (Ephesians 1:3) in Christ, that doubting, wandering sheep never enjoy. Jesus specifically said that a person must be born again before he/she is capable of seeing or entering God's kingdom (John 3:3-5), but He did not say in that passage or elsewhere in Scripture that all children of God see and enter His kingdom in terms of this abundant life, this "special" salvation in time that believing children of God enjoy.

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Worship service each Sunday
Joseph R. Holder

10:30 A. M.
Pastor